



## **OFFICIAL MINUTES OF THE BOSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE EXAM SCHOOLS ADMISSIONS TASK FORCE**

**June 17, 2021**

The Boston School Committee's Exam Schools Admissions Task Force held a remote meeting on June 17, 2021 at 5 p.m. on Zoom. For more information about any of the items listed below, visit <https://www.bostonpublicschools.org/esataskforce>, email [feedback@bostonpublicschools.org](mailto:feedback@bostonpublicschools.org) or call the Boston School Committee Office at (617) 635-9014.

### **ATTENDANCE**

Exam Schools Admissions Task Force Members Present: Co-Chair Michael Contompasis; Co-Chair Tanisha Sullivan; Acacia Aguirre; Simon Chernow; Matt Cregor; Tanya Freeman-Wisdom; Katherine Grassa; Zena Lum; Rachel Skerritt; and Rosann Tung.

Exam Schools Admissions Task Force Members Absent: Samuel Acevedo; Zoe Nagasawa; and Tamara Waite.

BPS Staff Present: Monica Roberts, Chief of Student, Family and Community Advancement; and Monica Hogan, Senior Executive Director of the Office of Data and Accountability.

### **DOCUMENTS PRESENTED**

[Agenda](#)

[Meeting Minutes: June 11, 2021 meeting](#)

Exam School Simulations updated with zip comparisons

### **CALL TO ORDER**

Mr. Contompasis called the meeting to order. He announced that simultaneous interpretation services were available in Spanish, Haitian Creole, Portuguese, Cabo Verdean, Vietnamese,

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Cantonese, Mandarin, Arabic, and American Sign Language (ASL); the interpreters introduced themselves and gave instructions in their native language on how to access simultaneous interpretation by changing the Zoom channel.

Ms. Parvex called the roll. Mr. Acevedo, Ms. Nagasawa, and Ms. Waite were absent. Ms. Aguirre, Mr. Chernow, and Mr. Cregor arrived after roll call.

## DISCUSSION

Ms. Hogan presented an outstanding data request. She showed a spreadsheet that reflected how the tiers would impact neighborhood diversity, for both 20% citywide, 80% straight rank by tier, as well as 100% straight rank by tier. What has been added are two additional tabs that look at the difference between the simulation results and different historical data.

Ms. Sullivan opened up the conversation about an assessment for the 2022-23 admissions school year, acknowledging that the city would still be impacted by Covid-19.

Ms. Grassa gave an overview on when the tests were given in a normal year. She said the MAP test was given in the fall and in the spring and potentially in the winter. She said the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System test (MCAS) was given in the spring of both 5th and 6th grade. Ms. Skerritt added to the timeline that families received notifications regarding exam schools in March and any delay in results would also impact the results for other schools in the district. She also said they should be aware that the MCAS scores they would be looking at would be those of the students in the 5th grade.

Ms. Skerritt asked about the growth measure and how it aligns to an indication of grade readiness. She argued that if only growth was assessed, students could still show growth and be below grade level. Ms. Sullivan said that NWEA indicated that as MAP growth was aligned with the MCAS, NWEA would be able to work with the district to identify what the threshold would be for determining that a student was performing at grade level.

Mr. Contompasis said he was not comfortable with using growth as a factor and that they needed to take non-Boston Public School (BPS) students into consideration.

The members talked about the possibility of using as a criteria 5th grade MCAS proficient or better, or math and ELA grades B or better. Mr. Contompasis thought this could be problematic, as BPS students would have two ways of eligibility compared to non-BPS students.

Mr. Contompasis suggested that all students would have to take the MAP test for purposes of determining grade level readiness. and then use the Grade Point Average (GPA) as the mechanism by which students would be chosen. He also suggested that if a student had above a 3.0 GPA and tested badly, they could still have an opportunity to enter the pool of applicants.

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Ms. Sullivan said one of the experts that talked to the Task Force mentioned using an assessment as a tool to verify or validate a student's GPA. She also said it was clear from the school leaders that they were concerned about the students' readiness and being at grade level.

Ms. Lum suggested having a 5th grade MAP threshold, or a GPA that meets grade level achievement to get into the applicant pool and then use the students' 6th grade MAP test, and their GPA equally weighted, in order to determine who from the applicant pool receives invitations.

Dr. Freeman-Wisdom recommended using an assessment to verify grade level readiness, and then apply the GPA. She said she thought that every student should have to take an assessment, so that the grades were verified. She also would use GPA as a straight ranking.

Dr. Tung referred back to a public comment speaker and said English Language Learners (ELL) should be accepted at exam schools as research shows that when language learners become proficient in English, they do as well or better than native English speakers on a range of indicators. She also said this was the reason she didn't believe in the use of an assessment as that excluded English learners and students with disabilities. Mr. Chernow agreed with Dr. Tung on the district not being inclusive to the ELL students or special education students.

Ms. Skerritt added that this was also a concern when talking about an essay and other subjective indicators, as they all favored wealthy applicants. She said just because a student's language was developing, it did not mean that those students were not at grade level, and the same for special education students. Ms. Grassa said they could offer the test in multiple languages, and also have a spoken alternative for students to choose from.

Ms. Sullivan said she could accept the suggestion of using the assessment as the threshold to get into the pool and using the GPA as ranking to determine the order in which a student would have the opportunity for seat selection.

The members talked about the support to English Learner students, and students with Individualized Educational Plans (IEP) and accommodations at the three exam schools.

Ms. Sullivan asked the members what they thought about using the MAP growth assessment as a qualifier for the pool; the district would need to work with NWEA to determine what the threshold should be to reflect students being at grade level or above. Mr. Cregor said he was comfortable with this plan.

After some discussion between some of the members, they arrived at the possibility of having students use MCAS or MAP to qualify for the pool. For the non-BPS students, they could sit for two MAP growth offerings. Ms. Aguirre said she was open to having the MAP growth test and having it more than once. She did caution on the timing of the year on when to give the test.

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Mr. Contompassis wondered if they were talking about multiple assessments or multiple tries at the same assessment, and asked how to ensure that non-BPS students have the same options. Ms. Grassa said they would have to have two Saturday administrations for those students.

The members discussed at length about how many MAP tests a student could take, at what time and at what point during the year and grade. They also discussed if students could qualify for the MAP even if they didn't qualify for the pool from their MCAS 5th grade scores.

Ms. Sullivan suggested looking at MAP of spring of 5th grade or MAP of fall of 6th grade which would give the students two opportunities to demonstrate grade level performance, even if they only needed one.

Mr. Chernow said that he didn't see the need to see anything else if the students' grades were 3.0 or better. He also thought that if students were taking the MCAS, it seemed counterintuitive to make them take another test.

Ms. Grassa explained that she supported using grades and assessment, as it gives an opportunity for students who maybe haven't found their niche in the classroom, but are at grade level or the students that might not be the best test takers but are at grade level. She added that it was a way to find a balance.

Dr. Tung said one of the options could be a test, another GPA, another short answers with a rubric, and the fourth option could be a capstone.

Mr. Contompassis said how important it was to keep the process simple and transparent. He also reminded the members of the former working group that they had looked at the 4th grade MCAS results for meets and exceeds level and the results weren't good. He proposed that all students sit for the MAP test in November, as a threshold test. If a student had a bad day on the MAP test and had a GPA of 3.5 or better with an educator's validation of the fact that this is a student that shows tremendous promise, they could get into the applicant pool. He added that another alternative was Ms. Nagasawa's suggestion of a portfolio opportunity.

Ms. Aguirre said she agreed with Dr. Tung that there should be multiple ways for students to show what they could do. She expressed concern with capstone and portfolios, as that would give more opportunities to more privileged students with more access.

Ms. Sullivan asked the members if there was consensus to use MAP as a threshold assessment for getting into the pool, and giving the students the opportunity to take the test two times in the 6th grade.

Ms. Skerritt said she disagreed that there would be no pressure on educators to be the validator, as that would put the decision making in the hands of a few teachers, which were the same people who allocated the grades.

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Dr. Tung said she didn't agree with Mr. Contompassis' suggestion and she believed the qualifier to the pool should be either MCAS, MAP, or GPA.

Ms. Skerritt said she supported the proposal of the first opportunity for a test to be the 5th grade MCAS, as all BPS and other non-BPS students took it anyways. She thought there was a precedent for the MCAS after this year. This would be used as a threshold. Then the students would have multiple fall and winter opportunities of MAP. She also thought that there should be opportunities for students with high grades that might have narrowly missed the threshold.

Mr. Cregor said he was open to those options. He said there could be an opportunity for students not attending BPS to take a MAP in the spring of 5th grade.

Ms. Sullivan asked the members if they could agree on the following criterias: the assessment would be used as a qualifier to get into the pool, this could be either through their 5th grade MCAS, or 6th grade MAP score in the fall. Dr. Tung and Mr. Chernow said they didn't agree with that option.

Ms. Sullivan said that she was hoping to reach a consensus but if they didn't, they would have to vote. The members discussed the possibility of adding a new meeting to the schedule to make their final decisions about the recommendation.

## GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

- Stephanie Shapiro Berkson, South End resident, Eliot and Boston Latin School (BLS) parent, testified in support of the work of the Task Force.
- Steve Yang, West Roxbury resident, parent, testified questioning the qualifications of the Task Force members.
- Peter Piazza, Somerville resident, Massachusetts Consortium for Innovative Education Assessment, testified in favor of the use of a lottery in exam school admissions.

## CLOSING COMMENTS

Dr. Tung responded to the comments of Mr. Yang. She summarized her extensive professional background in education focused on equity and justice. She also said that she refused to be part of the narrative authored by white supremacy which pits historically marginalized groups against each other so that white people can stay on top.

## ADJOURN

At approximately 8:30 p.m., the Committee voted unanimously, by roll call, to adjourn the meeting.

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Attest:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lena Parvex". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "L" and a long, sweeping tail.

Lena Parvex  
Administrative Assistant